
Traditional AppliquÃ© with Natalie Chanin

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

- Applique is an age old technique that we've given a modern twist at Alabama Chanin. This technique is easy to master, but yields dramatic results when used in combination with our cotton jersey fabric and stenciling techniques. In this workshop you are going to learn the basic applique technique with a knit fabric, along with variations that you can use for dramatic results.

Chapter 2 - Stenciling

Materials

- To get started with the stenciling, we just have collected our supplies together. The first thing that you're going to need is a stencil design, we've taken a design from Alabama Studio Sewing design which is this paisley stencil on page 124. But this could be any design that you find anywhere that is copyright free. So we've printed the stencil out, this is downloadable from our website, AlabamaChanin.com. We have a printed stencil, we use this really wonderful material called pennant felt which is actually exactly what it sounds, it's what they use to make those little pennants with at ballgames. But it has a great durability, it's very easy to cut and holds the stencil shape really well after the stencil is cut. But you can substitute for this, there are milers that you can purchase at every hobby craft center. When we first started making stencils we actually just used posterboard or cardboard, something like that. So you can also just use things that you have readily available in your home. We use a cutting mat so as not to damage the surface that we're cutting on. We use a utility knife or, this happens to be an exacto knife. Once the stencil is completed and finished we're gonna be transferring the finished stencil onto this cotton jersey fabric here, with the fabric we're gonna be using a Createchs airbrush paint. And there's several methods and materials you can use to transfer through the stencil onto the cotton jersey fabric. We at Alabama Chanin, we use the very simple airbrush tool, this is connected to any basic air compressor that you might use for filling up the tires of your car or that you have for home use. Since this is not readily available for everyone we're going to be using a variety of spray bottles but you can use anything as simple as a household sponge, we did a small shop at a local craft store and there are all kinds of different methods from sponges on rollers, stencil brushes, sort of squeegees, there are specially made sponges for the transfer of stencil, these are all readily available everywhere. It's always our suggestion that you use what you have readily available at home and see how that works before you spend a lot of money investing into supplies that you may not use. Sponges like this will leave kind of a print in the shape of the sponge there, but it can also be a beautiful effect. So it's a very simple thing, it shouldn't feel intimidating whatsoever to get started with it.

Creating the stencil

- The first step of this is to affix this design to our stencil felt here. Now, we've just sent this out to our local printer and had it printed in one full piece, it's really very affordable and much easier than printing it out on a home printer where you have to then piece the design together, but everything is possible, so just do what's easiest and what works best for you in your own home. We use this spray mount to attach the printed artwork onto the pennant felt. This has a whole list of dangers and rules that you should follow when you're using it. You should definitely have good ventilation,

it's not very good for your lungs, and there are some storage regulations that you should take care to notice, but all you do is open this up and you're just gonna lightly coat the back of your paper. And, then, you're just gonna lightly press it down, I'm gonna put this kind of down in the middle of my stencil felt. You see how easy it is to pick it up and reposition it so you get it perfectly in the middle of your, or not perfectly, nothing is perfect in this world, but in the middle as best you can in your cut piece of pennant felt. The next step is to take your Exacto knife, these are very, very sharp, this is a tool, I always warn everybody who works in our studio, this can cause a lot of damage to your fingers, so always work in a way that you are very mindful of where you're cutting and what you're cutting on. This is one of the reasons that we also use this mat on the back just to keep this from cutting through. It will destroy any furniture or anything that's laying underneath your design. So, it doesn't matter where you start, you can start any place at all, and what we're going to do is cut away the black area of the pattern design. And, all I do is I hold my hand slightly and put the point of the knife exactly on the black line, and then I just push it through and start to cut. Again, this is not a perfect method, so you just do kind of the best you can and just follow the stencil line around. You have to pick the knife up from time to time and move it so that you get a smooth line, and you just follow the line all the way around. Sometimes it's easier in areas to, again, lift this up and use kind of a sawing method to saw through the pennant felt. Again, be very, very mindful of where your fingers are on the back of the pennant felt. You don't want any accidents in the process of making beautiful textiles. So, you just simply trace around the black line all the way, you're cutting that whole area away. You know, when we first started working with stencils, we really just used cardboard, I just got poster board like what you get at every local grocery store, what every grade school kid uses for their, you know, class project. We graduated from there and started using some cardboards and different kinds of boards and that sort of thing. Today, on the market, there are all kinds of stenciling supplies and materials available that are readily, in small towns all across America and the world, that you can use for this from this pennant felt to Mylar. The pennant felt is, perhaps, a little bit more difficult to find than the Mylar is. We do sell this from our online store by the yard, and I think, if you can just do a quick internet search, you might find some other possibilities, but, you know, we urge everyone to explore and try all different kinds of materials. You may find something better than what we've found, so let us know if you come across something that works even better than this. And, you just continue around the entire stencil shape until you've removed all of the black areas. I have prepared one already, which I have here. So, once everything is cut, the stencil will look like this, and you simply remove the paper for your finished design.

Spray bottle stenciling

(rustling) - I'm going to use this butcher paper to protect my work surface as we transfer the textile paint onto the fabric. You can use newspapers, anything that you have available at your home. We've cut some pieces of fabric, but we suggest doing this on just any kind of scrap of the same fabric that you're gonna use. It's better to test this process out not on your original project in case something should go wrong. And it also gives you the option to try a few colors, a different technique, different spray bottles. We're gonna show you how those different things and tools can lend different results to the finished product. The first thing that we do is take our stencil. And again, we're gonna spray a light coating of this spray mount on the back of the stencil just to make it adhere to this fabric a little bit better. So it's just a light coating. (hissing) Again, use that in an area that's well ventilated. And you'll see that once you lay the stencil down on top of the fabric that that adhesive helps it just adhere to the fabric lightly. Like I mentioned before, we use an airbrush

gun in a normal situation, but today we're going to be using these spray bottles. We did some experiments with them and found that, actually, the smaller bottle produced a nicer mist that gave a kind of even paint distribution over the stencil. But we'll try each of them so that you can see what the difference in the two things are. I'm gonna use just a small pencil to hold my stencil down as I spray. And I'm just going to pump (light tapping) (hissing) this spray bottle... And cover the stenciled area. (light tapping) (light hissing) Conversely, you can try using other bottles. You can see that this produces a kind of gloppy surface. So this doesn't really work out for me, so what I would use, this smaller spray bottle, if that's the look that I wanted to go for. Or what I might do is pour some of this paint into the plate here. (clattering) Just, oh, let's see. I'm gonna use this one. (clattering) And I would choose one of these stencil brushes, perhaps, to try it this way. (light tapping) (rustling) So you just continue doing this across the whole piece of your fabric. Always keep in mind (clink) that it really is best to test methods on a scrap before you start doing the whole project. I'm gonna switch back to the spray bottle because it works better for me and continue over the course of the whole fabric. (light tapping) You can see this just goes a little bit faster and seems to make a cleaner line on it. So this is one of the reasons it's very important (light tapping) to test out the methods that you're going to use when you're working. So at this point it's really important, also, to talk about the actual paint itself. Again, many hobby stores (clink) carry all different kinds of paint. We are very fond of this Createx Airbrush Colors. It is a water-based paint that is very easy to mix. It comes in a range of colors, and we use these colors, pretty much, to make every color that we use at our office. If you have just a few little samples of colors, can make an limitless range. So it's not necessary to buy every one that you see. We, when we were using these colors with the airbrush, we allowed them to air dry and cure. It takes about three weeks for it to really make a permanent bond with the fabric. It's really important as you are working with paints to read the manufacturer's suggestion that you don't stencil it one day, wash it the next, and have your work disappear. So that would be, of course, devastating (laughing) for anyone after you've gone through this whole process. So that is really important. We wash our garments after three weeks. Our label says wash gently, and in the past we have said wash by hand. To be honest with you, I wash mine in the washing machine and throw it in the dryer after it's done, so. (laughing) Except on sunny days, when I try to hang the things outside. But you know, just general, if you use good laundry rules of washing on a gentle cycle and taking care of your things, you should have no troubles whatsoever. So now we're just gonna peel this stencil back just to reveal the design on the fabric. (rustling) You can see how sometimes you have to work it up slightly. So this is how you would reposition. For example, if you wanted to add a different stencil or you wanted to reposition the stencil on a larger design, you would simply lift it up like this and then place it back down and continue with your stenciling.

Airbrush stenciling

- When we airbrush at Alabama Chanin, there's just some steps that we go through and I'm gonna illustrate those steps here today. The first step is mixing your paint. It's really important to buy smaller containers because over time the paint is going to start to dry in the bottle. Move your paint into a little airbrush jar. There are several different kinds of airbrushes that you can purchase, but our experience is just to use the most simple, basic one. Single Action, it's called. Once we have the airbrush filled with paint and ready to go, we're going to connect our airbrush tool to our hose and our hose to our compressor. Lay your fabric out and smooth it into place. We're going to take our finished cut stencil and apply our spray adhesive to the back of it. Again, this is going to just give

you a kind of firm connection between the stencil and the piece of fabric underneath that you're going to be transferring the pattern to. Once you have your fabric laid out, lay the stencil on top of the fabric and we're ready to paint. Because the paint particles are very small, we use a standard mask that you can find at every home improvement store. Move your airbrush tool over the stencil and the fabric in a very smooth method. You're laying the paint down in a really fine mist over the fabric which gives it a very opaque quality, so the color of the fabric can very dramatically change how the paint appears once it dries onto the fabric. So it's really important, not only for your airbrush tool but for the color of the paint, to just always test on a scrap of fabric that you're going to be using for your project. We, as a general rule, keep our airbrush tool between eight inches to 10 inches away from the stencil. We found that that keeps the paint from blowing out too much on the fabric and perhaps, what we call over-spraying underneath the stencil shape. You may find from time to time that your paint will clog. We have a little method here that we use at Alabama Chanin of just lightly placing our finger over the nozzle of the airbrush, which builds up the pressure slightly behind the nozzle. When you release the finger it forces that built-up pressure out and will push the particle actually through. In smaller stencil areas we'll use a small pointed object. An open paper clip, a pencil, anything that you have that has a small point to hold down the stencil while not getting your finger in the area where the airbrush is applying paint. A very exciting part of this is the final reveal when you pull the stencil away and see the finished pattern on the fabric underneath. At Alabama Chanin we sometimes use this simple technique as the finish technique for one of our garments. You have the finished design. And this is, again, the foundation of everything that we do at Alabama Chanin. The stenciling allows wide variety of designs that we use on any number of garments at any time. If you allow your finished stencil to dry thoroughly and then store it flat, it's something that you can keep and use for years to come.

Chapter 3 - Applique

Materials

- We're gonna start the workshop by going over our materials. The applique that we're going to do is on a finished garment. We've chosen our camisole dress from Alabama Studio Style. This is our second book and it has the camisole pattern in the back of the book. But this can be done on any garment or project that you'd like to do. You can use a T-shirt, you can use a skirt from your closet, a pillow, any kind of home furnishings. It's great for all kinds of treatments and finished products. So we have our finished garment. We have our Anna's Garden stencil, which is from our book, Alabama Studio Sewing and Design. You can refer back to our stenciling workshop for how to create the stencil, how to transfer the textile paint through the stencil onto your finished garment. Additionally, we're going to have fabric for applique. We're using our 100% organic cotton jersey, our Button Craft thread, embroidery scissors, garment scissors, needle, and pins.

Applying a stencil to your project

- The first part of the applique process is deciding which stencil you would like to use to transfer to your garment. We've chosen our anise garden stencil from our new Alabama Studios Sewing and Design. You'll find that on page 11. Or it can be downloaded from our website, www.alabamachanin.com in its full size. We print out our stencil at our local copy shop. This prevents you from having to piece the stencil together to get the finished design. You can refer back to our stenciling workshop for all the details on how to cut the stencil and transferring the stencil to the actual garment with our textile paint. Here we have our finished anise garden stencil,

which we used to transfer the textile paint onto the garment. There are a few tricks for transferring on a larger scale like this. Every applique project requires a different amount of transferred applique pieces. This particular dress, we transferred four full pieces of stencils. But your project could have a different scale. So we always recommend just estimating about how much you'll need, and add an extra panel so that you'll have extra pieces in case of accidents or mistakes along the way. This particular dress has six panels. And it's very easy to take the six panels and work within those panels around the stencil. We used textile paint, which I'll show you in a minute. But you can also use something as simple as a permanent marker to transfer the pattern onto the garment. You are only going to be using this stencil design as a guideline for where to place your applique. So however you, the easiest way or method for you to get that stencil onto the fabric is all that you need to worry about. Once you've finished one panel, you can simply pick up the stencil, move it to another panel, follow the same process, turn it over to the back, move to a new panel, and transfer the stencil to that next panel. We have a finished dress here, which we used our airbrushing method with. Here's a finished stencil. Again, we're only using this stencil as a guideline for where to place the applique. So in the transfer process of the stencil to the garment, if you wind up with some places where you're missing some appliques, we'll simply go back in with a cut piece of applique and add that in. So don't worry too much if your pattern doesn't run in a fluid method all the way around the project that you're completing. We'll be able to fix that at the end. So the next step in the process is that we are going to talk about the applique fabric. So now that we have the dress completed, we're going to use our cotton jersey fabric and apply the stenciling to the back side of the cotton jersey fabric in a mirror image. So if you've used this side of your stencil to apply to your dress or your project, whatever your chosen finished product is, you're actually going to turn the stencil over to apply to your applique fabric. So we're going to be stenciling on the back of the cotton jersey fabric. You can use textile paint for this. If you're using a light color, we recommend that you use a very light color of textile paint, otherwise the color can show through. You can use a disappearing ink marker. You can use the Sharpie marker, but you just have to be careful to cut all of the color away. We have some completed applique fabric here, which is then, again, the mirror image of the dress. Because what we're going to do afterwards is cut the individual pieces out and flip them back over and applying it over the top of the stencil shape here. We're using this stencil design as a guideline for where to place the applique. So essentially you're going to have paint on paint sealed between the layers of sewing. Refer back to our stenciling workshop for all the details on how to get the fabric paint through the stencil and onto your finished project.

Cut, pin & stitch appliqué pieces

- Here we have our stenciled applique fabric. I'm gonna start by taking one of these panels and matching it to the stencil design on the dress. This is a really important part of the process. We urge you to cut one piece and sew one piece, cut one piece, sew one piece. Otherwise you're going to end up with a jigsaw puzzle that's very difficult to put back together again. So unless you like to also work a jigsaw puzzle as you're doing your applique project, we suggest that you follow this very simple method. So what I've done is I've matched my stencil applique to the mirror image of my stencil design on my base garment. Take a pair of scissors and cut out that first applique piece. I've got a variety of scissors here. Different shapes sometimes do better with different scissors. I'm gonna start out trying these spring loaded garment scissors. I'm gonna cut about a sixteenth of an inch around the outside of that applied shape. Once I have that shape cut, I'm going to match it to the design on my garment and pin it into place. There are two reasons I prefer to cut one, sew

one. The first reason is that if you cut and pin a grouping of applique around here, what's gonna happen is while you're sewing, your thread is gonna get caught on the pins there. The second reason is that while I'm sewing, I'm going to be sticking myself with those pins. For me it works best to cut one, sew one. Applique is one of the few times when we use a single strand of our button craft thread. For this reason when you're sewing with a single strand, it's really important not to tie a double knot. But to tie the knot at least four or five times. What happens is if you refer back to our workshop on the physics of sewing, what happens is as you tie the knot you need a larger knot on the knit fabric to have that family of stitches to support the weight to this thread and the knot. I'm gonna tie about five knots here to have a little bit of a thicker knot. And hide this knot on the inside of my garment. I'm just gonna come up from below. We're gonna be using a whip stitch to apply the applique fabric. I'm just gonna pull this closer to me. I'm gonna pull the fabric up, pull the thread up, gonna pull the thread up, go down in what we call a parallel whip stitch. I try to make my stitch as parallel to this edge of the cut applique as possible. Again you're going to keep your stitches about an eighth to a quarter of an inch and uniform as you move around the applique shape. We've used a thread color that's very close to the applique color that makes for a very elegant design. But we're gonna show you some swatches at the end of this workshop that illustrate how different materials and different colors react with the applique process. See how that thread got caught on that pin? That's exactly what happens if you have pins all the way around here. As you work your thread gets caught up on these pins. At this point I think I could even remove this pin and just hold the applique with my finger to make sure that all that textile paint is covered. I'm gonna leave that pin in right there just to keep that secured down as I move around it. You can stretch if you find that you've cut a piece slightly too small, you can stretch it slightly. It's not gonna change the appearance of the garment. Again, cotton jersey fabric is very forgiving and very user friendly material. You can kind of fudge things in this way or the other as you need, as you're working through your project. Again, remember this is not a cure for cancer, it's a frock. So we have to keep things in perspective as we create our projects. I'm gonna turn this around so we can get a little better handle. I'm gonna add this pin back in over here to secure this fabric down over the stencil design. You can see as we move around that there's a lot of thread and a lot of stitches in this process of using a whip stitch to apply the applique piece to the base garment. This is the reason that we use a single strand of thread because the applique's very securely stitched to the base of the fabric. Also, if you use a double strand of thread when applying applique with a whip stitch, what happens is those two strands have a very hard time of acting as twins as they move through the fabric. So it's quite difficult to get the stitches to look really beautiful and tightly nested together as you sew. When you come back around to the beginning, you're simply gonna turn your garment on the backside. Again, tie this knot, which is not a double knot, but three or four knots together, five knots together. Just so you get that big structure of the knot resting on top of that knit fabric. I'm gonna leave a little bit of a longer tail. Clip that off. Remove my pin. And I'm ready to move onto the next shape. Since I've already cut this, since I've already matched my mirror stencil to this shape, it's gonna be really easy for me just to take the next shape. You just continue by cutting out applique. Cutting, pinning, and sewing. But since we've already show you how to sew on all the pieces, you'll just continue in the same method around the dress. So we have a partially completely version here to show what the process looks like along the way in that stage. Beautiful right?

Finished examples

- Here's our finished applique dress. You can see that the inside is just as beautiful as the outside. A

lot of our clients will actually turn the dresses or the garments inside out, just to show the beauty of the stitching on the inside. We've also prepared some small swatches that incorporate different embroidery stitches that you can use to vary the applique. This particular swatch is done with a running stitch. The running stitch is a faster stitch than the whip stitch that we've used for our finished garment. Here we have a whip stitch that's done with an embroidery floss. This is actually a variegated embroidery floss, where the color moves from pink, to orange, to red. So you can see they variation and how that works. When using an embroidery stitch with applique, we use four strands of embroidery floss. The process is exactly the same as you would've used for your finished garment. This is applique using a blanket stitch and a button craft thread, a single layer of button craft thread. This is applique using a back stitch with a variegated embroidery floss. One of the very important things is when you're using embroidery floss, never use embroidery floss with a running stitch. It's not strong enough to carry the weight of the applique and all the layers of fabric together. So the only time that you will use a running stitch in a embroidery floss, is when you're using a back stitch. And this is applique with a back stitch using a normal unvariegated embroidery floss. All of these stitches are detailed in our newest book, Alabama Studio Sewing and Design. Chapter seven is strictly about applique. On page 100, it starts with our basic applique techniques, shows applique with beading, with a straight stitch, applique with a back stitch, applique with a blanket stitch, and even some of our more advanced applique techniques, like relief applique and the stripe appliques, which you can find in my other applique workshops. This dress is truly one of the most beautiful pieces that we've ever made. And however you decide to customize your own piece, it will be a garment that you treasure forever.